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ABSTRACT

This abstract uses graphs and text to summarize recent statistics on the education of children with disabilities based on data from the U.S. Department of Education. It reports that 12.2 percent of students enrolled in American schools in 1993-94 were officially designated as having disabilities. More than two-thirds of students have mental or emotional impairments with 51.2 percent of all students with disabilities identified as having learning disabilities, followed by speech/language impairments (21.2 percent), mental retardation (11.3 percent), and "serious emotional disturbances" (8.7 percent). Much smaller numbers were reported for hearing, orthopedic, visual, multiple, and other disabilities. Analysis indicated that 70.4 percent of students with disabilities spend at least two-fifths of their school day attending classes with non-disabled students; students least likely to be integrated are those with mental retardation, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness. Data from 1991-92 indicate that 57.3 percent of students with disabilities graduate from high school with ordinary diplomas. Concerning postsecondary education, statistics from 1992-93 indicate that 6.3 percent of college undergraduates and 4.0 percent of graduate and professional students identify themselves as having a disability. A 1990 survey of former special education students found that 16.5 percent had attended college. (DB)

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Disability Statistics Abstract

Number 19

Education of Children with Disabilities

by H. Stephen Kaye

According to administrative data from the U.S. Department of Education, 5.3 million children and adolescents participate in federally supported programs for students with disabilities. This figure comprises 582,000 young children (under age 6) in preschool programs and 4.7 million students aged 6 and above attending primary and secondary schools. In all, 12.2 percent of students enrolled in American schools in the 1993–94 school year were officially designated as having disabilities.

Of the 4.7 million primary and secondary students with disabilities, just over half (51.2 percent, or 2.4 million persons; see Figure 1) are identified as having learning disabilities, while most of the remaining students have speech or language impairments (21.2 percent, or 1.0 million), mental retardation (11.3 percent, or 536,000), or "serious emotional disturbances" (8.7 percent, or 413,000). Smaller numbers have hearing (63,000), orthopedic (56,000), or visual impairments (24,000). The remaining 215,000 students include those identified as having multiple disabilities (108,000), "other health conditions" (82,000), and deaf-blindness (1,000).

More than two-thirds of students with disabilities have mental impairments or emotional conditions.

Taken together, emotional problems and mental impairments, including learning disabilities, affect more than two-thirds (at least 71 percent) of American students identified as having disabilities. Speech and language impairments affect an additional one-fifth of students with disabilities. By contrast, only a tiny fraction (2 percent) of primary and secondary students with disabilities have sensory impairments alone.

Mainstream versus segregated education

A large majority of students with disabilities (70.4 percent during the 1992–93 school year) spend a substantial fraction of their school day attending classes with non-disabled students. Some 40.5 percent spend at least four-fifths of the day in mainstream classes; these students are identified in Figures 2 and 3 as attending "regular classes." An additional 29.9 percent spend at least two-fifths of their class time with non-disabled students, with the rest of their day allotted to special education in so-called resource rooms.

Most of the remaining students, who spend between zero and two-fifths of their class time with non-disabled peers, attend separate classes in regular schools (24.1 percent of all students with disabilities). An additional 5.5 percent attend separate schools or other facilities, where they have even less exposure to children without disabilities.

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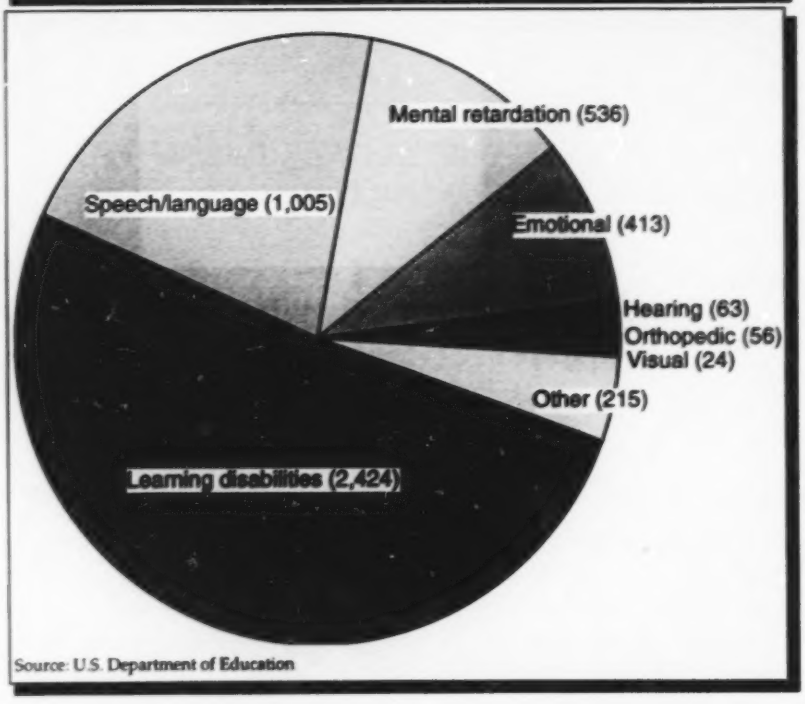
Because of a strong belief in the benefits of mainstream education for most children with disabilities, as well as for their non-disabled peers, recent national policy has promoted increased placement of students with disabilities in integrated classrooms. As shown in Figure 2, the proportion of students attending integrated classes at least two-fifths of the day ("regular class" or "resource room") has increased from 69 percent in 1988–89 to 72 percent in 1992–93. A much larger gain has been made in the proportion of students attending mainstream classes for the bulk (at least four-fifths) of the school day, which rose from about 30 percent to 40 percent during that period.

Access to mainstream education varies greatly by the nature of the disability, as shown in Figure 3. Nearly all students with speech or language impairments (92.4 percent during 1992–93) spend significant time in integrated classes, as do three-quarters (78.7 percent) of those with learning disabilities and two-thirds (66.4 percent) of those with visual impairments. Roughly half of those with orthopedic, hearing, or emotional impairments spend at least 40 percent of class time with non-disabled students (55.1, 49.2, and 46.3 percent, respectively).

Those least likely to spend much time in integrated classes are students with mental retardation (33.9 percent, with only 7.1 percent in regular classes for four-fifths of the day or more), multiple disabilities (26.5 percent), or deaf-blindness (22.4 percent).

Figure 1: Students aged 6–21 with disabilities, by type of disability, 1993–94 (numbers in thousands).



Source: U.S. Department of Education

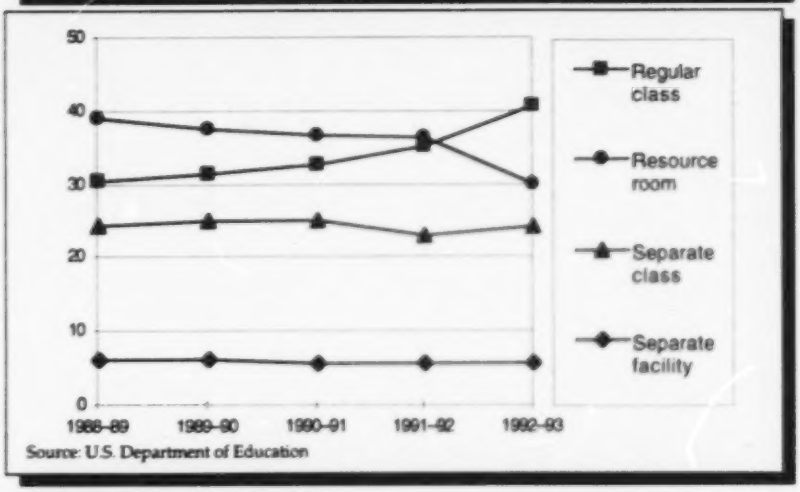
Educational outcomes

According to data for the 1991–92 school year, a majority (57.3 percent) of students with disabilities leave secondary school as high school graduates. Most of these (43.9 percent of the total) graduate along with their non-disabled peers, receiving an ordinary diploma. The remaining 13.4 percent graduate via a certificate of completion or a modified diploma.

The likelihood of graduating depends on the nature of the disability, as does the means of graduation—diploma versus certificate (see Figure 4). Students with sensory impairments are the most likely to graduate, with nearly three-quarters of such students (73.0 percent of those with hearing impairments and 72.6 percent of those with visual impairments) doing so, mostly with standard diplomas. Almost two-thirds of students with orthopedic impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, and learning disabilities graduate (66.2, 63.8, 63.0 and 60.5 percent, respectively), but only 36.1 percent of students with mental retardation and 38.7 percent of those with multiple disabilities receive ordinary diplomas. Half (51.3 percent) of students with speech or language impairments graduate, while only one-third (34.6 percent) of those with "serious emotional disturbances" do so, the lowest graduation rate for any identified category of disability.

Students with mental retardation or multiple disabilities are the least likely to be educated in integrated settings.

Figure 2: Proportion of students with disabilities educated in mainstream and segregated settings, 1988–93.



Source: U.S. Department of Education

Postsecondary education

Department of Education statistics from 1992–93 indicate that 6.3 percent of college undergraduates and 4.0 percent of graduate and professional school students identify themselves as having a disability. Only specific causes of disability were asked about: learning disabilities, visual and hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, speech impairments, and health-related disabilities. Because approximately 8.4 percent of primary and secondary school students have conditions from the above list, according to administrative data, it is probable that students with disabilities are less likely to go on to college than their non-disabled peers, and still less likely to continue their education through graduate or professional school.

A 1990 survey of former special education students indicated that 16.5 percent had gone on to college and 14.7 percent had entered vocational programs. Students with visual impairments were more likely than any other disability group to go on to college (53.9 percent), while those with mental retardation and multiple disabilities were least likely (2.5 and 8.0 percent, respectively).

Notes

Data in this abstract come from:
U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. 1996. *Digest of Education Statistics 1996*. NCES 96-133. By Thomas D. Snyder. Washington, DC.
U.S. Department of Education. 1995. *Seventeenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC.

Credits

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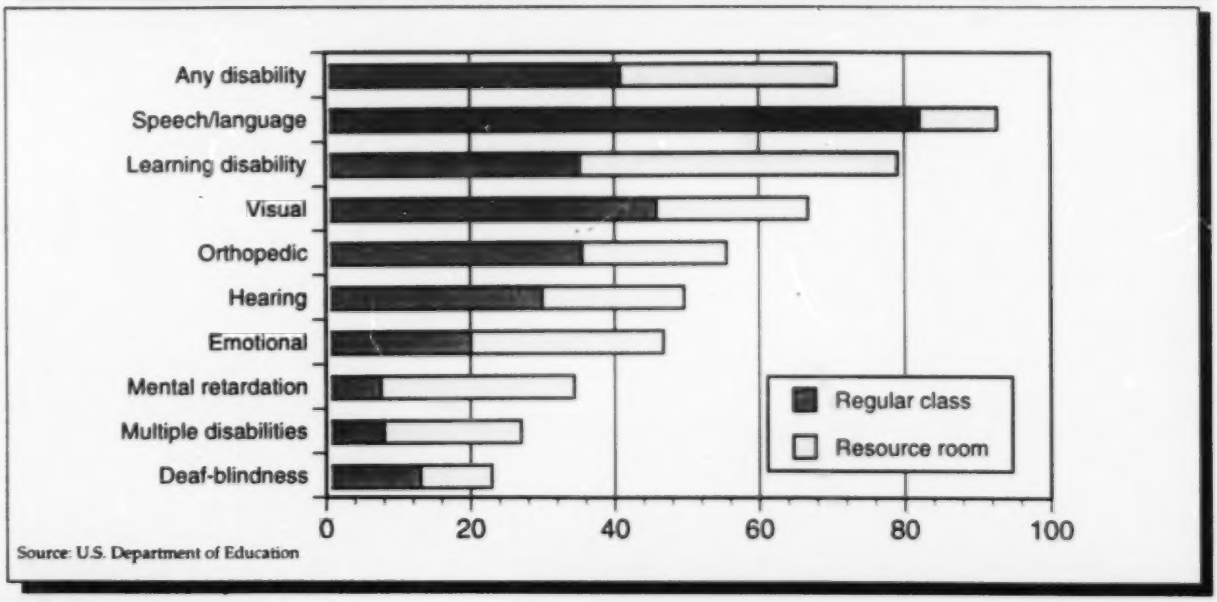
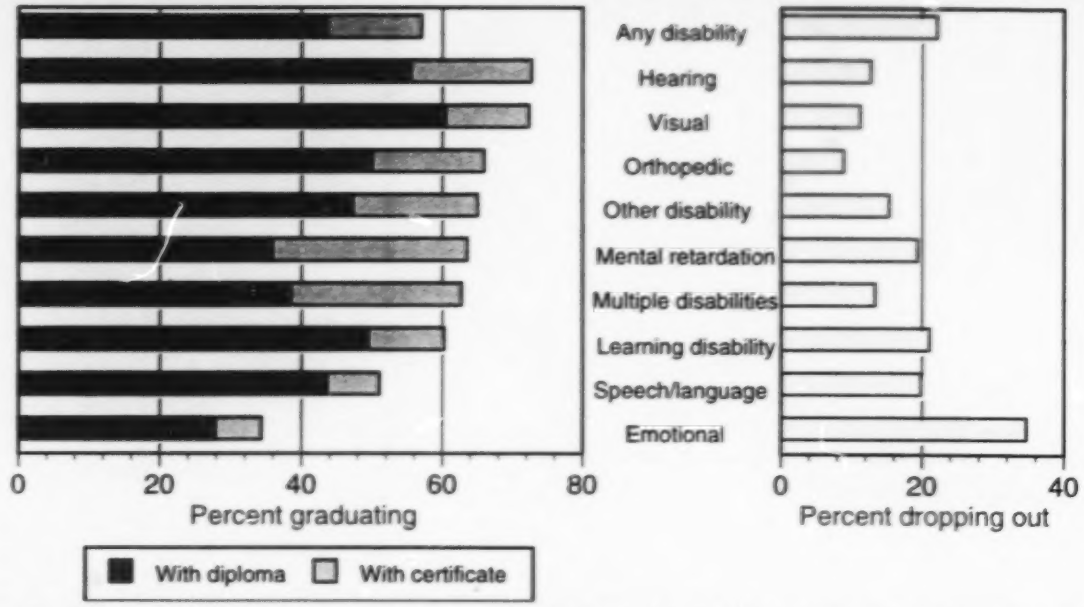
Figure 3: Proportion of students with disabilities educated in mainstream settings, by type of disability, 1992–93.



Source: U.S. Department of Education

*U.S. Government Printing Office: 1997 - 521-080

Figure 4: High school graduation and dropout rates for students with disabilities, by type of disability, 1991–92.



Note: Denominator is all students with disabilities aged 14 and over exiting the educational system, including those who reached maximum age, died, or stopped receiving special education services for unknown reasons. Dropout rates include only students known to have dropped out of school.
Source: U.S. Department of Education

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